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ABSTRACT

The purpose of creative activities in the classroom and the part creativity should have in the reading program are discussed. Both the gifted and not-so-gifted child can be motivated, challenged, and provided with enriching experiences through creative activities planned and encouraged by a resourceful teacher. Suggestions given include the following: (1) oral reading of a poem or other selection which is chosen and prepared independently, (2) presentation of a book panel for which the children do the planning and moderating, (3) dictation with self-correction for which a tape-recorder could be utilized, (4) use of television in the classroom for current items of interest which can be expanded into larger projects, (5) use of the typewriter, (6) dramatization of Shakespeare as an extension of some culturally enriched home backgrounds, (7) making movies, (8) use of the contract agreement by which the teacher can provide independent work for the gifted student, (9) exchange of teacher-pupil letters to motivate the reluctant reader, and (10) use of printing press stories for remediation. Emphasis is placed on the need for flexibility in order to take advantage of opportunities rich in creative possibilities as they happen. References are included. (DH)

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Speaker's topic: CREATIVE READING ACTIVITIES FOR THE MIDDLE GRADES

Topic of the Meeting: INNOVATIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICES

What is the purpose of creative activities in the classroom? What part should creativity play in the reading program at the intermediate level? What is meant by the expression as applied to the language arts?

Lila B. Smith (4) gives us an answer to these questions in terms of stimulation of interest in Reading Instruction for Today's Children where she says:

> At present, we must strive as we have never striven before to develop wide, permanent, carry-over interests in reading. Mechanized communication agencies are striding across the reading habits of America with a heavy tread. Reading is faced with strong competition. As already indicated, radio, television, and movies almost completely satisfy many persons' desires for entertainment and information. If reading is to continue to function as the most valuable means of tapping our inexhaustible supplies of printed communication, then we must put forth far greater effort than ever before to establish abiding interests.

Some of the aspects of creativity are to challenge, to motivate, to stimulate originality of thought, and to enrich the experience of the pupil. The enrichment recommended for the gifted child is recognized to consist of independent work, the use of initiative and creativity. These are the same qualities and skills which we

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want for each child, regardless of giftedness. Says Kirk (3) of the problem of enrichment in the elementary grades, "Teachers generally do not have the time or in some cases the knowledge and skills to provide all the enriched experiences a gifted child needs." We would wish not only for wisdom, skills and time, but also for a classroom equipped with all of the modern visual aids and equipment. Let us proceed, however with the idea that teachers are resourceful and see if many of the following might not be adaptable to any intermediate group.

ORAL READING

Improvement in oral reading may be expected when the following technique is used. The pupils will choose a favorite poem, or a selection from fiction, and prepare it for reading aloud in front of the group. The teacher then guides them to decide upon important elements of oral speech, such as volume, pitch, emphasis, pause, accuracy, and pace. These are written as a list on the board. After the pupil reads his passage, he may be given a rating for each of the items, and at another lesson will have an opportunity to improve his score. The chart may be transferred to the overhead projector and be a continuing activity.

BOOK PANEL

A sure way to stimulate reading on the part of participants and listeners is the book panel. If the voices of the panelists are taped, the activity will be valuable for future classes or for sharing with other schools. Pupils are guided to choose suitable books, to organize ideas and to present the program with finesse. A class discussion of categories such as biography, animal stories, mysteries, humor, or poetry serves to introduce the activity. A moderator is

chosen for each group. Individuals are responsible for completing an "Outline for Panel Discussion on Books" form for each book which they will mention. These reviews are filed for reference and enjoyment by all the children. A guide for the moderator might consist of questions such as: are the characters lifelike, do you think the theme is interesting, is the story fascinating right to the end, are there many different episodes in this book, has the author written other books? When the groups have selected their participants, decided on their list of books and the category, they are ready to present the panel. When they go to another room with the program, or give it for a Book Fair, they will prepare a display of books and jackets to enhance the interest of the listeners.

DICTATION WITH SELF-CORRECTION

A tape recorder and set of earphones may be utilized to correct reversals and to facilitate remediation for pupils who are weak in syllabication and endings. This system is also recommended for the pupil whose independent study habits are lax. A paragraph from the speller may be used or the teacher may prepare a dittoed set of sentences or selection to be dictated on tape. Pupils play the dictation, correct it from the model and turn it in. The teacher further checks it and the student will continue to write the same lesson until it has been taken down correctly. Using earphones permits the work to take place without disturbing others in the class. The process of playing the tape, taking the responsibility for correcting and learning the work encourages a systematic learning process.

T.V. IN THE CLASSROOM

In Common Sense in Teaching Reading, Gans (2) says, "Exper-

iences through which youngsters acquire a respect for thorough study, prolonged inquiry, and continuing interest will help establish in them some fundamental attitudes. They will acquire a respect for knowing facts about or having an opinion about a subject. Tasting the satisfaction of gathering information and feeling adequately informed on a subject will remain important to them. They are on the way to becoming readers who continue to read newspapers and magazines to be informed and who read in fields related to their work so they may increase their personal competence."

A T.V. viewing of the flight of Apollo 12 in class provided the impetus for a group of boys in a grade six class to experience a worthwhile project which expanded to benefit a number of other classes. A parent working in the space program had provided a copy of a time schedule of events of the flight for each member of the class. The many technical terms provided an opportunity to study word origins. Students brought in current periodicals and daily news items as the flight progressed. The activity narrowed down to four boys who were reluctant readers but avid space fans. One had a talent for drawing. They read further from books in the library, almanacs and encyclopedias, going back to the original Sputnik which was launched the year before these children were born, as they discovered. They were interested in comparing statistics, assembling and recording them. The result was a portfolio of the launch, the flight, and the splashdown, embellished with original watercolor illustrations, containing articles, book reviews, a poem, and scientific information. They had learned to analyze, summarize, classify, rearrange, and edit. The work was displayed to different classes, giving the boys experience in oral presentation. Finally,

another parent, hearing of the interest in space flight, and having access to films, sent a NASA film on the Apollo 9 trip which all the classes joined to view and appreciated because of the work and sharing of the original enthusiasts.

USE OF THE TYPEWRITER

The use of the typewriter in the classroom is a definite stimulant in the reading program. Children may learn to type in the grades by utilizing a record or tape program of lessons. Letters, both friendly and business, articles, reports, captions, and creative stories seem to go off better when the student may go back to a machine and write from notes or do the work on the typewriter. It has been found that the common problem of reversals in spelling will many times be corrected when the pupil has learned to type.

SHAKESPEARE IN SIXTH GRADE

No opportunity should be overlooked in dealing with today's child. In many suburban areas he and his parents are so richly knowledgeable from the rapidity of communication and from the mobility of our society that a classroom should be a vital extension of the student's home background. When a teacher in this kind of community discovered that some of the children had studied Hamlet the year before, she was not surprised that they wanted to give A Midsummer Night's Dream as a dramatic production. A pair of children took the college edition of the play and edited it to seventeen typewritten pages. Most of the class had viewed the television version of the play because it had been so highly advertised and recommended. They liked the comedy and they enjoyed the language of Shakespeare. The parts were learned at home, rehearsals were directed by students, and costumes and scenery, while not

elaborate, evoked the feeling of woodland scene and Athenian court. As the play was being rehearsed, an experienced Shakespearean actress from the drama department of a nearby university came into the classroom and talked to the children about acting, about their speech and gestures, and told them of some of the parts she and her husband had played at the Shakespearean festival at Ashland, Oregon. By now, some of the pupils had read other of the comedies and tragedies of Shakespeare and were able to benefit from the resource speaker, and to ask questions about interpretation. The final production was put on for the school and for the parents. The tape which was made continues to interest pupils who remember seeing an older brother or sister or friend in the play.

MAKING MOVIES

While making motion pictures in elementary classrooms requires enthusiasm and imagination, one teacher found that the pupils were quite prepared in these areas. They picked up the pantomime, gesturing, and facial expression like veterans. Original skits, miming, and dramatic interpretation of classics such as the white-wash scene in Tom Sawyer might be used. Film making is rich with possibilities for imaginative effects. Close-ups of drawings, photographs, the children's pop art, shots from nature, seasonal effects, even moving to a different milieu than the one in which the school is located would be possible in working with a camera. The film and developing is provided in workshop courses which some colleges offer.

THE CONTRACT AGREEMENT

An interesting way of dealing with independent work for the more able student is termed the "contract agreement." In Making

Better Readers, Strang (5) says, "The gifted usually need a check on basic skills. Some of the teacher's instructional jobs with able learners are as follows: planning an individual reading program with the student; showing him how to check his plan; helping him to raise his standards; guiding his choice of reading; teaching him higher-level skills of locating information, critical reading, and interpretation of literature; and showing him ways and means of sharing his reading experiences." In contract work, all of these skills may be taught and checked while increasing the student's fund of knowledge and adding to the interest quotient for home and class study.

The teacher sits down with the pupil and explains the terms. A "contract agreement" form is dittoed off with the name of the school and blank spaces for the pupil's name, the beginning and completion dates, and the number of days or weeks in which the work is to be completed. On one side of the sheet there is space for the assignments, on the other a lesser space which is for evaluation by the teacher. At the bottom are blanks which the pupil, the teacher, and the parent sign. Some of the assignments, in addition to daily classwork, might be: book reports on recreational reading, dictionary work, memorizing and paraphrasing verses or poems, researching topics such as Greek and Roman myths or word origins, planning a report to the class, preparing original vignettes or verses in booklet form with illustrations, making an outline of plans for a hobby show.

THE TEACHER-PUPIL LETTER EXCHANGE

Turning from the capable and average to the reluctant reader,

a very simple and individualized means of encouraging him is for the teacher to explain that she would enjoy knowing something about his home life. If he will write her a short letter every evening and bring it to her in the morning, she will answer it. Sometimes a youngster has never before received a personal letter. The vocabulary and sentences will be very simple to begin. The child usually writes about a pet, or watching T.V., or what was on the menu for dinner. The teacher reads the letter before the class starts, immediately writes the reply and hands it to the pupil so that it may be part of his reading lesson. This correspondence may be intermittent, with short letters exchanged for a week, the project dropped, then again in a few weeks, the pupil will be eager to correspond again.

PRINTING PRESS STORIES FOR REMEDIATION

The Freinet system of attacking the problem of remedial reading which one investigator found in the elementary schools of France could be used in any language. It consists of a simple printing press on which the children learn to print their own stories. The lettering is quite large and block printed illustrations accompany the text. A collection of the stories is exchanged with remedial reading classes in other parts of the country. The children in Paris will become very excited when they receive stories from the south of France telling of flowers blooming, and of playing on the beach, as they are experiencing a snow storm in a northern climate. The motivation factor is very high, and there is a tactile feature to this method which is beneficial to boys. The student will work to learn vocabulary in order to be able to read the pupil-made stories. The pedagogical rational is that the printing press system allows creative expression of

the child's natural feeling and emotions, rather than subjecting him to the adult's viewpoint.

CONCLUSION

Gallagher (1) says, "...emphasis needs to be palced on the emotional atmosphere in the classroom," and that "the ability to allow students freedom within a certain structure is not easy to attain. It presents a challenge to the teacher's personality as well as to his intellectual skills." Reviewing the activities gleaned from these classroom situations, perhaps the one outstanding feature is the necessity for flexibility. When the teacher is sensitive to extraordinary opportunities, and is willing to adjust the schedule to accommodate a beneficial plan of action, the creative experience emerges.

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